Presidential Aides in the Hot

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PETER FLANIGAN
. . . testify or not?

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The intriguing prospect of presidential assistant Peter Flanigan being grilled with no holds barred by Sens. J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), Frank Church (D-Idaho), Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) and other members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has arisen as the result of a little-noticed parliamentary maneuver on the Senate floor.

Flanigan, whom Sen. John V. Tunney (D-Calif.) excoriated recently as the man who "carries the mail" for big business in the Nixon administration, has managed to avoid being subjected to intensive questioning on Capitol Hill through invocation of the doctrine of executive privilege.

He appeared briefly before the Senate Judiciary Committee to answer questions about the ITT case, but under limitations as to what could be asked him.

Many senators would love to question him, with his protective robe of executive privilege pulled away, on such matters as his role in maintaining the oil-import quota system, which a presidential study group said costs the public $5 billion in extra oil payments a year, the ITT case and other decisions involving business regulations and policies.

Now, his relative immunity from Capitol Hill scrutiny may be about to change. In the Senate last Friday, a bill extending the Export Control Act for two more years, already approved by the Senate Banking Committee, was referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for study of one of its titles, with orders that the Committee send it back to the floor in 30 days.

The particular title to be studied by the Foreign Relations Committee gives permanent statutory status to the existing Council on International Economic Policy in the White House, which Flanigan heads.

Committee Chairman Fulbright served notice a year ago, long before Flanigan was related to the job in any way, that he intends to add an amendment making the post of executive director of the council subject to Senate confirmation—which isn't the case at present. This means that Flanigan would have to be approved by the committee and the Senate in order to stay in the post.